

Introduction

Christy Hovanetz is a Senior Policy Fellow for the Foundation for Excellence in Education. Dr. Hovanetz served as the Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Education and Assistant Deputy Commissioner at the Florida Department of Education. She has worked in education policy since 1999 serving as the Director of Evaluation and Reporting, Director of Reading First and a Policy Analyst for Governor Jeb Bush. She graduated summa cum laude from St. Cloud State University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education with a minor in mathematics and is a certified teacher in the state of Minnesota. She earned her Masters of Public Administration at the University of Minnesota and a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration and Policy at The Florida State University.

Foundation for Excellence in Education

ExcelinEd, a 501(c)(3) organization was launched by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush in 2008 as a hands-on, how-to policy and advocacy organization that designs and promotes sound education policy centered on student achievement, accountability and customized choices for America's families.

Mission: To build an American education system that equips every child to achieve his or her God-given potential.

Vision: An education system that maximizes every student's potential for learning and prepares all students for success in the 21st century.

Guiding Principles:

- All children can learn.
- All children should learn at least a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time.
- All children will achieve when education is organized around the singular goal of student success.

Our Services:

- Policy Development
- Advocacy
- Model legislation
- Policy Implementation
- Technical assistance
- Public outreach and awareness

ESSA Overview

Accountability plans:

- Due by April or September 2017 (state's choice).
- Work to date: Many states have been working on them for months; doing stakeholder engagement, surveys, etc.
- Publicly released: To date, most states have released plans for public comment.
- Approval: Once submitted, the Department will have 120 days to approve them.

Implementing those plans:

- 2016-17: Transition year – States must test and must report, but there is no federal requirement that they identify schools.
- 2017-18: ESSA-compliant systems must be in place as soon as possible; at the end of the year, states must identify schools for comprehensive / targeted support based on those systems.
- 2018-19: Identified schools receive supports and interventions.

ESSA School Accountability System

ESSA requires states to “establish a system of meaningfully differentiating, on an annual basis, all public schools in the State, which shall be based on all indicators in the State’s accountability system...for all students and for each of subgroup of students.” The system must give “substantial” weight to each indicator and “in the aggregate much greater weight” to the academic indicators (1-3 below) compared to the additional indicator of school quality or student success (4).

1. Academic achievement
2. Another academic indicator (for elementary/middle schools, growth or another indicator; for high schools, graduation rate)
3. English language proficiency
4. Additional indicator(s) of school quality or student success

States will be pressured to add additional new indicators into that system, especially considering the requirement that they include at least one indicator of “school quality or student success.”

- These indicators provide very valuable data about schools, but they may not be appropriate for inclusion in the school rating calculation.
 - Safety/expulsion rates set up perverse incentives by keeping teacher second guessing whether to discipline a student which may result in a more dangerous learning environment.
 - Teacher and Principal longevity provides disincentives effective teachers from moving to schools that need more help
 - Chronic Absenteeism
- School ratings should be restricted to outputs over which schools have maximum control such as academic achievement, student growth, college and career readiness, graduation rate, etc.).
- In addition, states should be aware how technically challenging it can be to add a new indicator to their systems: it requires that states have a valid and reliable way of measuring it, collecting accurate school- and subgroup-level data, etc.
 - These other – very important indicators – should be reported prominently on the school and district report cards.

ESSA adds new data to existing reporting requirements such as educator qualifications disaggregated by high vs. low poverty schools, state/local/federal per pupil expenditures, military family student performance

- The transition to ESSA prompts states to reinvent their report cards into a 21st century, easy-to-use tool for empowering parents.
- ExcelinEd is developing an open-sourced prototype of an innovative online report card that we will be ready to share with states this year.

Goals: States must establish ambitious long-term goals and interim progress targets in three areas: academic achievement (as measured by proficiency), high school grad rate, English language proficiency

- Groups that are further behind must make “significant progress” in closing achievement gaps.

Identification of Schools: The school accountability system must identify 3 categories of schools at least once every 3 years:

- **Comprehensive:** Bottom 5% of Title I schools + all high schools with grad rate <67%
- **Targeted:** “Consistently underperforming subgroups” as determined by the state
- **Additional Targeted:** Subgroups performing as poorly as the Comprehensive Support Schools.

A-F School Grading Introduction

All states are required to have a school accountability system. As of today, 17 states ¹have adopted A-F school grades making A-F the most common school accountability rating system in the nation.

School grades provide transparent, objective, and easily understood data to parents, educators, policymakers, and the public to spur improvement among all schools. To fully realize the benefits of a transparent A-F school grading system, Michigan should adopt these fundamental principles developed based on 18 years of experience across dozens of states. Evidence from multiple states demonstrates that using these fundamental principles works.

Results

Progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Supports A-F

The eight states (AZ, IN, LA, AL, NM, OK, UT, and FL) with multiple years of A-F implementation are making faster improvements on NAEP 4th and 8th grade reading and math than the Nation. For example, since implementing A-F, Florida has outpaced the Nation in Grade 4 Reading by 13 points. Over this period the Nation increased 8.5 points while Florida improved 21.5 points.

It is also important to note that the ‘outpacing’ is underestimated because the improving A-F states cannot be backed out of the Nation.

Research Supports A-F

Grading Schools Promotes Accountability and Improvement: Evidence from NYC, 2013-15. Marcus A. Winters. *Education: Pre K-12. Urban Policy Education* NYC. May 24, 2016.

During 2007–13, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg evaluated schools using A–F; Bill de Blasio became the new mayor on January 1, 2014, and his administration has moved sharply away from the information-collection and accountability metrics. Winters’ paper explores the effects of the Bloomberg era’s school letter grades on NYC’s lowest-performing schools; it also estimates the effect of removing these grades after the first year of the new de Blasio accountability system.

- The decision to stop reporting summary letter grades removed an instrument that had led to positive changes at NYC’s lowest-performing schools.
- A positive, meaningful F-grade impact was detected in the final year (2013) of the original policy, six years after it was first adopted.
- Schools that would have earned an F in fall 2014—the first year of the de Blasio system—showed no improvement relative to schools that would have earned higher grades.

Feeling the Florida Heat? How Low-Performing Schools Respond to Voucher and Accountability Pressure. By Cecilia Elena Rouse, Jane Hannaway, Dan Goldhaber and David Figlio. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 2013), pp. 251-281. [American Economic Association](#).

“While numerous studies have found that school accountability boosts test scores, it is uncertain whether estimated test score gains reflect genuine improvements or merely ‘gaming’ behaviors. This paper brings to bear new evidence from a unique five-year, three round survey conducted of a census of elementary schools in Florida that is lined with detailed administrative data on student performance.

¹ A-F states in order of adoption: FL, AZ, IN, LA, NM, OK, UT, AL, MS, NC, OH, AR, ME, WV, GA, TX, and TN.

We show that schools facing accountability pressure changed their instructional practices in meaningful ways, and that these responses can explain a portion of the test score gains associated with the Florida school accountability system.”

Public Opinion Favors A-F Grading Schools

May 2014 National Survey Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates

- 84% support assigning schools a letter grade regarding how well they educate students.

2013 Public Opinion Strategies of likely Tennessee voters

- 77% Favor an A-F grading scale for each school so parents can more easily identify where the good schools are instead of the current rating system.

2015 Georgia statewide poll Conducted by McLaughlin & Associates

- 80% favor an A –F school grading policy, while just 14% oppose. Support for this policy is broad across key sub-groups.

Fundamental Principles

To fully realize the benefits of a transparent school accountability system, states should adopt the following fundamental principles:

1. Use clear and transparent descriptors of A, B, C, D, and F
2. Include objective, concise student learning outcome measures
3. Balance measures of student performance and progress
4. Calculate student progress toward grade level and advanced achievement
5. Focus attention on the progress of the lowest performing students in each school
6. Report results in a timely manner as close to the end of the school year as possible
7. Communicate clearly to parents
8. Establish rigorous criteria, with automatic increases, to earn A, B, C, D, or F grades
9. Use grades to identify schools for recognition, intervention, and support

1. Use clear and transparent descriptors of A, B, C, D, and F

Using clear and transparent A, B, C, D, and F grades, rather than vague categorical descriptors, ensures that everyone understands how schools are doing. Even if parents don’t understand specifics of the school accountability calculation, they will know that A and B is good, that D and F is not good, and a C means there is room for improvement.

School grading brings a command focus on learning because no one, including administrators, educators and parents is satisfied with a C grade or lower. Everyone strives for excellence in a way that does not occur with fuzzy descriptors like “satisfactory” or “performing.”

In an A to F system, low performing schools are easily identified and communities rally around them. Florida witnessed countless stories of communities coming together to improve schools to raise student achievement. That didn’t happen when Florida used fuzzy descriptors such as performing, low performing, and critically low performing.

A-F descriptors are easily consumable by the public and draw a heightened amount of interest.

2. Include objective, concise student learning outcome measures

The purpose of federal and state school accountability is to ensure that students are learning. School accountability measures need to be based on what is most important and what measures student success. Strong school accountability models include objective student outcome measures such as performance and progress on statewide assessments, graduation rates, performance on advanced coursework, and/or college readiness measures. These objective measures focus on student learning and achievement.

These measures should be concise in their calculation and not require complex mathematical adjustments or explanations. Simpler is better because it allows individual classroom teachers to focus on goal instead of figuring out how to game the system.

For example, simply using the percent of students who score grade level or higher on the math assessment is a much stronger calculation than a complex indexing system that awards some points for partial proficiency, full points for grade level performance and extra points for advanced proficiency. Seeing 59 percent of students proficient in math is more meaningful than earning 59 points on a “proficiency index.” Simple, concise calculations provide transparency and meaningful data to parents and educators.

Use of performance indices can prevent educators, parents and policymakers from determining if all, some, or any students are performing where they should be each year because schools earn a complicated index score as opposed to a clear percentage of students who have – and have not – met the proficiency expectation. Using an index can mask low achievement when a school can earn more credit for a handful of advanced students and partial credit for their non-proficient students. Such an outcome not only complicates transparency but also makes these students less likely to receive needed support to reach grade level expectations.

Using an achievement index means schools can earn comparable scores despite contrasts in achievement. A school with all students scoring at the proficient level could earn the same index score as a school with half of its students scoring below proficient and the other half scoring at the advanced level. Even without the added complexity of an achievement index, states must often spend significant time and resources explaining the results of their accountability system and helping parents compare schools under that system. An achievement index makes both tasks more difficult because states must also explain how values were determined for each performance level and who determined those values. States will also have to help parents navigate why two schools with the same achievement score could have very different performance.

The process and methods schools use to ensure students learn, such as school culture, student engagement, and access to courses, are extremely important and should be reported publicly, primarily through parent-friendly school report cards. But that information, should be used by local decision makers to improve the educational environment, not included in the portion of statewide accountability systems that identifies schools needing support and interventions.

3. Balance measures of student performance and progress

School accountability systems need to balance student and student progress. All students can learn, and a strong accountability system must capture measures of that growth. While the goal is that all students will be performing on grade level, the reality is that many are not. Focusing on both proficiency and growth provides a truer, fairer picture of how a school is doing.

While measuring student proficiency provides useful information on where a school stands in relation to mastery of grade-level standard, it doesn’t provide a complete picture. Every school has students who perform at different levels of proficiency. Therefore, states cannot simply compare proficiency across schools because

proficiency may reflect the performance of students who entered the school, not the impact of the school demonstrated through student growth.

Using a growth component in the school accountability formula levels the playing field so that schools do not have advantages or disadvantages simply because of the students who attend a school. The growth component requires schools to demonstrate that all students, high achieving and low achieving, have made a year's worth of progress in a year's time. Growth ensures schools earn credit for making progress with students who may have entered their school below grade level and have not yet achieved grade level performance, and it also puts pressure on schools who have high performing students to keep them high performing.

Perhaps most importantly, both proficiency and growth should be equally balanced in an accountability system. To weight growth more than proficiency provides less incentive to ensure students are on grade level. States that too heavily weight progress may find themselves issuing A grades to schools with far too few students achieving on grade level, which makes the accountability system lack credibility. To weight proficiency more than growth will create an uneven playing field.

4. Calculate student progress towards grade level and advanced achievement

There are two widely used methods for calculating student growth – “criterion-based” and “norm-referenced” – and adopting a criterion-based method is essential to ensure that each individual student is making progress. In a criterion-based system, students are measured on their individual progress towards meeting pre-determined expectations. The strongest expectations set the amount of growth a student must make each year at a level that moves her towards achieving proficiency, or if already proficient, to advanced achievement. This growth expectation determines whether the student has demonstrated progress towards the mastery of a certain set of skills.

Norm-referenced growth models, by contrast, compare students to the performance of other students across the state – not how well an individual student progressed towards meeting a predetermined standard. In this method, there will always be winners and losers – students that make growth relative to others and students that do not make growth relative to others, regardless of how well or poorly the students are performing. In other words, even if student performance improves substantially across the state, there will be “losers” a set of students that are determined to not be making growth, because another set of students did just a little better.

Norm-referenced growth models are a zero-sum game. Norm-referenced growth models compare students to the performance of other students across the state – not how well an individual student progressed towards meeting a predetermined standard. Thus, there will always be winners and losers – students that make growth relative to others and students that do not make growth relative to others, regardless of how well or poorly the students are performing.

Norm-referenced growth scores do not clearly convey to parents or to the public what percentage of students at a school are progressing toward mastery of standards. This is especially difficult because similar school-level growth scores do not necessarily mean similar amounts of growth occurred in those schools.

Criterion-based growth to proficiency models are the fairest, because they measure what matters – whether each student is learning enough each year to become proficient – not how well a student did compared to their peers, using an ever-changing scale.

5. Focus attention on the learning progress of the lowest performing students in each school

Effective school accountability systems place more focus on students most in need, without ignoring those that are performing on grade level or higher. Instead of focusing on individual demographic or curricular subgroups of students, which was required under the federal accountability system, and which many states gamed to “hide” populations of students within schools, states should focus on the lowest performing students in each school – because each school has a group of lowest performing students.

Low performing students come from all races and ethnicities, all income levels and all curricular backgrounds, and they are found in all schools. Focusing on these lowest performing students ensures the ‘right’ kids in every school are getting the extra attention and resources needed to catch up with their peers.

6. Report results timely manner as close to the end of the school year as possible

It is important that results of school grades are released with enough time for parents to make decisions about where to send their child to school. Issuing grades before the end of the school year, or shortly thereafter, has many benefits.

- For schools earning a high grade, getting a grade close to the end of the year allows teachers and students to celebrate success when they earned it. Teachers and students who move to different schools do not get to share in the success of earning a good grade.
- For schools earning a low grade, getting a grade close to the end of the year ensures that leaders and educators have ample time over the summer to analyze where their weaknesses were to develop and implement a plan to improve before the start of the next school year.
- For states that have school choice options or remediation plan requirements attached to the school’s grade, issuing grades close to the end of the school year allows for these policies to more be effectively implemented.

7. Communicate clearly to parents

Parents need to have access to school grades and the underlying data for the underlying measures. The state should make report cards easily accessible on the agency website. The report cards should have a school grade reported with an explanation of the statewide grading scale to give parents context for the grade. Information should be easy to navigate and explained in simple language and graphics. Schools and districts should be required to notify parents of the school’s grade and provide information to parents that cannot access the website.

And ideally, parents should know what their options are if they are not pleased with the school’s performance.

8. Establish rigorous criteria, with automatic increases, to earn A, B, C, D, or F grades

Once it is determined which components are included in the school grading system it is important to establish rigorous criteria and the scale to earn a grade. Setting the grading scale for earning an A, B, C, D, and F is critical to the success of school accountability.

Setting the grading scale too low will result in all schools earning an A or B, which defeats the purpose and meaning of a transparent system. Parents will not know how their school is performing, and the school will not have any incentive to improve. Setting the grading scale too high so all schools are earning a D or F will not build confidence in the system. The school grading scale should reflect that state’s national standings and make sense in the context of current student achievement. For example, if the state is ranked at the bottom of the states on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading and math measures, then an

accurate grading scale would result in more D and F schools than A and B schools that first year. However, if the state was in the top 10 on NAEP measures, a system that produced more D and F schools than A and B schools would suggest that the grading scale was too high.

Even if a state initially sets a high bar for grades that results in many D and F schools, history proves that it will not remain this way for long. Schools will rise to the challenge and work to improve student performance and their school grade. It is important that the school accountability system has a mechanism to raise the bar as more and more schools are making higher marks. Success is never final and reform is never finished. Raising the bar is critical to continuous improvement.

States should set in law the long-term school grading scale desired while providing for thoughtful, established, automatic increases in the scale as schools are ready (e.g., automatic school grading scale increase).

For example, states could ensure the grading scale will increase by 5 percentage points when 65% or more schools (elementary, middle or high schools) earn an A or B in each year. These increases will occur until the statewide school grading scale reaches: 90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, 70-79% = C, 60-69% = D, and <60% = F.

An automatic increase allows for the state to set a grading scale that will ensure an appropriate distribution of school grades in the implementation year, but provides for an automatic increase to raise the bar when schools are improving. This approach has two primary benefits: 1) alleviates need for potentially annual changes in law to adjust the scale which can become politically challenging once grades have been issued over time, and 2) allows the scales to be different for elementary, middle and high schools over time – even though they will all ultimately reach 90-100% = A.

Codifying an automatic grading scale increase will allow for raising the bar while avoiding having to open the school grading law making it susceptible to other changes.

9. Use grades to identify schools for recognition, intervention, and support

Regardless of the nuances of methodology states use to meaningfully differentiate schools, a key factor is identification of schools that should be rewarded, or provide extra support and resources for intervention at schools that are consistently failing to serve students.

Schools that improve a letter grade from the prior year or earn an A, should be recognized as **Reward Schools**. Recognition should include financial awards for educators as well as publicity and certificates of recognition.

- **Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools:** This category includes the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools and all high schools with graduation rates below 67 percent.
- **Targeted Support and Improvement Schools:** These are schools where one or more groups of students are “consistently underperforming,” as determined by the state.
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement Schools:** These are schools that have one or more groups of students who are performing as poorly as the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools.

Because of the many benefits of having a unitary system of federal and state accountability, the school grading system will be the primary mechanism for identifying schools for support and improvement. However, high schools may also qualify based on graduation rates.

Schools meeting the following criteria will be identified as **Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools**:

- Schools with an F letter grade. F schools are the lowest performing schools in that they have the lowest percent of students proficient in each subgroup and the lowest percent of students in each subgroup making growth. States currently using A-F school grading have identified more than 5 percent of Title I schools as F school.
- High schools that have graduation rates below 67 percent.

Schools meeting the following criteria will be identified as **Targeted Support and Improvement Schools**:

- Schools with a D letter grade. D schools exhibit larger achievement and growth gaps than higher performing schools (i.e., subgroups that are “consistently underperforming.”)
- A, B and C schools with subgroups performing as poorly as the bottom 5 percent of schools.
- A, B and C schools with subgroups performing as poorly as the subgroups in D schools.
- A, B and C schools who did not meet the needs of their students learning English.

Reward Schools

School Recognition Awards, when schools succeed, some states reward them with cash. Schools that earn an A or improve a letter grade – even if it is from an F to a D – they earn \$100 per student. Money goes directly to the school bypassing collective bargaining. School level personnel determine how the School Recognition Program funds are spent. The funds can be used for any non-recurring expenditure. Most funds – historically more than 85% – are used for teacher and staff bonuses.

Opportunity Scholarships

When the school failed the students, by earning an F for two out of four consecutive years, the student was given state funds to go to the school of their choice – public or private.

it an Opportunity Scholarship. You can call it a scholarship, call it a voucher, call it a grant, call it whatever you want. For these students, it was a lifeline to a better education. Unfortunately, the Florida Supreme Court ruled the program unconstitutional. In the last year of the program, just 753 students participated - 95% were minority and 75% were eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. Hundreds of thousands of students were eligible but only a tiny percent opted out of the public-school system. Our experience busts the myth that vouchers will cause a mass exodus of students from the public-school system. It didn't happen. Fact is, public schools improved when students have a choice to go elsewhere. And all students benefit.

Researchers from the Manhattan Institute, Cornell and Harvard Universities studied similar D-graded schools those that had no F grades in their history and those that had one F-grade in their past. Research concludes competition fuels student achievement in the Florida public schools under Opportunity Scholarships from 1999-2006:

- Manhattan Institute: Threat of vouchers improved student performance.
“Florida’s low-performing schools are improving in direct proportion to the challenge they face from voucher competition. These improvements are real, not the result of test gaming, demographic shifts, or the statistical phenomenon of ‘regression to the mean’.”
- Cornell University: Failing schools respond to threat of vouchers by raising student achievement.
- Harvard University: Choice provisions of Florida’s A+ Plan leveraged student achievement gains.

School Supports and Interventions

Under NCLB: Interventions – and the timeline for those interventions – was spelled out in detail.

Under ESSA: It will be up to states to answer the following questions, which **will** be very challenging (both politically AND technically):

1. What “tools” should be in a state’s “Turnaround Toolbox”?
2. Which identified schools/districts should receive those interventions?
3. When should the various interventions kick in? After 2 years? 3?

In the transition to ESSA, state education agencies (SEAs) will first develop accountability plans, which will be due to the U.S. Department of Education in April and September of 2017. Based on their individual accountability plans, each state will identify schools for targeted and comprehensive support during the 2018-19 school year.

- Require States to begin identifying new schools for Comprehensive Support and Improvement in 2018- 2019 (i.e., using data from 2017-2018).
- Require States to begin identifying new schools for Targeted Support and Improvement in 2019-2020 (i.e., using data from 2018-2019).
- Require States to begin identifying schools where one or more subgroups are at or below the performance of all students in the lowest-performing schools in 2018-2019 (i.e., using data from 2017- 2018) and at least once every three years thereafter. These schools, if they do not improve in a State determined number of years, will roll up into Comprehensive Support and Improvement (with the initial year determined by the State) as chronically low-performing subgroup schools.

States should influence district turnaround strategies by reviewing districts’ school improvement plans and by distributing federal improvement funds through competitive grants. ESSA requires states to approve districts’ school improvement plans and allows states to reserve 7 percent of Title I (federal dollars targeted to low-performing schools and districts) for competitive grants for school interventions. We recommend that states evaluate district plans against the most rigorous turnaround strategies and prioritize grant eligibility to districts that adopt them.

Increase choice to address persistently low-performing schools. In schools and districts that fail to improve, ExcelinEd recommends that states supplement these school interventions with concerted efforts to increase the availability of quality school options for students in persistently low-performing schools. This includes policies that encourage charter school expansion, attract high quality charter operators and promote community engagement.

Example: Remove Artificial Limits On And Promote The Growth Of High-Quality School Options

- State legislatures should consider intra- and inter-district choice policies that allow students to transfer to the high-performing public school of their choice.
- State legislatures should remove statutory caps on charter school expansion.
- State legislatures should create at least one statewide, non-district authorizing body.
- State legislatures should create an expedited process to allow high-performing charters to expand grade levels, enrollment or school sites.

Example: Attract and Cultivate High-Quality Charter Management Organizations

- State legislators should protect charters’ ability to make key staffing decisions, free of districts’ collective bargaining agreements.
- State legislators should ensure charters have the flexibility to design and implement their school model, including curriculum selection and school culture (including discipline).
- State legislators should allow charters to manage their own budgets.
- State legislators should ensure charters receive key resources, including equitable funding and access to underutilized district facilities.

- SEAs should pursue start-up funding for charter schools through the federal Charter Schools Program grant.

Example: Harness the Power of Opportunity Scholarships

States can establish opportunity scholarship programs in which students attending a consistently underperforming school are eligible for a voucher (of state funds) that they can use to attend a higher-performing public or private school of their choice.

- State legislators should consider establishing an opportunity scholarship (using state funds) available to students attending comprehensive support schools.

Ninety percent of funds will go directly to districts, but:

States must reserve 7 percent of Title I funds for interventions.

- States can distribute these funds to all districts serving the lowest performing schools or use a competitive grant program to create strong incentives for districts to adopt certain evidence-based school interventions.

States may also reserve another 3 percent of Title I funds to support a similar grant for direct student services, such as public school choice, personalized learning, transportation and credit recovery.

- **Direct Student Services:** Awards must go to districts serving the highest number of schools identified for comprehensive and then targeted support and improvement. Within those districts, the costs must be prioritized as follows:
 - First, for students at schools identified for comprehensive improvement.
 - Second, for low achieving students at schools identified for targeted improvement.
 - With any remaining funds, for low achieving students served by the district.

Examples:

- Change Staff: Replacing principal and significant percentage of staff.
- Re-start as a Charter: Close the school and restart it under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO) or an educational management organization (EMO).
- Close and Consolidate: Close the school and enroll its students in higher-performing schools in the district.
- Begin creating or supplement an existing course access program.
- Provide student transportation—regardless of whether students attend their neighborhood school, an out-of zone district school or a charter school.

Staff Quality and Support

- Schools' ability to recruit and retain effective teachers has a significant impact on school quality.
- Strong instructional leadership from the principal and district support can produce positive results.
- Strong teacher and leader preparation programs.

High-Quality Data and Reporting

- Data-driven decision-making at the state, district and school level is a common strategy in successful school turnaround efforts.
- High-quality and accessible data on school quality helps parents make informed choices for their children.

Integrated Student Supports

- Struggling schools, students and families often have additional health, emotional and behavioral needs but have trouble effectively accessing the maze of public and private services in the community.
- Organizations like Communities in Schools can work in conjunction with other transformative reforms to ensure state and local resources are reaching those that need it most.
- In addition to competitive grants and leveraging the power of school choice, states must ensure that certain policy conditions are in place to maximize the chances of successful school turnaround at the district and school levels.

